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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problems and issues involved in the organizational structure of the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education. The National Laboratory, which consisted of a coordination center and six university based research and development centers, was organized for the purpose of planning, sponsoring and conducting research and activities in the field of Early Childhood Education. The paper focuses on administrative concerns, discussing the characteristics of an effective decision making structure within an organizational model. Weaknesses of the National Laboratory's organizational pattern are outlined and alternative organizational structures are discussed. One of these alternatives, Plan Two, is recommended. The structure of this plan is discussed in terms of the criteria, problems and issues discussed earlier. Plan Two involved the establishment of a non-profit corporation, embodying a Board of Governors and a Coordination Center to conduct the business of the Laboratory. Special issues and considerations involving this plan are discussed. (BD)

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On National Laboratory
Organization

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and
The Staff of NCC

PS 009627

May 14, 1969

The research or work reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare through the National Coordination Center of the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education, contract OEC-3-7-70706-3118.

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Purpose

In accordance with a resolution passed by the Advisory Board at the close of the 1969 Spring meeting, the enclosed material is presented for your consideration and recommendations. In this paper we have tried to present the core issues regarding the organization of the Laboratory rather than deal with the symptomatic problems arising from the issues. Our direct day-by-day experience over the past eight months, plus the more indirect experience from the beginnings of the Laboratory, has led us to the conclusions which we present here. The basic issues have received extensive consideration by the Steering Committee and have been a topic of formal and informal discussion by the Advisory Board and the funding agency over several years. We, in the Laboratory, earnestly seek your advice and council on the problem of organization.

The Problem

During the meetings of the ad hoc committee on the establishment of a National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education, much of the discussion centered about the organizational structure, its form and the anticipated strengths and weaknesses of the alternatives under consideration. Clearly, consensus was reached on the need for a coordinated national effort and the broad organizational dimensions were

sketched. In the main, the locus of research and development work was determined as University based. Landmark operations were in existence, funded by the Office of Education, which would form the nucleus of the research and development effort of the Laboratory. Substantive leadership would be provided by the directors of the various research and development components and a coordination center. A broad base of social wisdom and field expertise would be marshalled by an advisory board.

While there was great uninimity among the ad hoc committee as to the substantive problems to which the Laboratory was to address itself and consensus concerning the broad organizational dimensions of the Laboratory, there was little agreement about the organizational specifics, particularly in regard to the decision making process. At the time, the Office of Economic Opportunity was considering sharing the funding burden with the Office of Education. This had the effect of creating additional ambiguity in the committee's deliberations. The need to move decisively on the part of the Office of Education precluded resolution of the basic organizational issues. On the basis of expediency, the Office of Education requested proposals for the establishment of a ccordination center from several types of existing organizations and institutions. The University of Illinois responded and its

proposal was accepted by the Office of Education. Professor J. McV. Hunt, originally appointed as chairman of the Advisory Board, became the first director of the National Coordination Center. Six of the original applicants for research and development components working under direct contract with the Office of Education, along with the Coordination Center and the ERIC Clearinghouse at the University of Illinois, became a loose confederation. Not until a year later, 1968, did the Laboratory become a more tightly knit organization under a prime contract administered by the University of Illinois through the Coordination Center with subcontracts to the university based research and development component centers.

The unfinished work of the ad hoc planning committee, which was not permitted the time to complete it, has become a major impediment to the Laboratory's movement toward fulfillment of its promise. In retrospect, major symptoms are clearly discernible in the short history of the Laboratory. The long and arduous discussions of the role of the Advisory Board by its membership, the agonizing attempts by the Steering Committee to establish operational objectives and priorities, the Coordination Center's attempts to wrestle with allocation of funds, and the decision by the first director to return to his personal professional pursuits are but a few of the major symptoms which point to the core problem, yet unresolved.

The core problem remains imbedded in the decision making structure and processes of the Laboratory. The question is, who makes what decisions under what conditions, when? Under the present organizational framework, four major issues can be seen which in concert create an acute situation.

1. The decision making structure is implicit rather than explicit. There is no designated deliberative policy making body empowered to deal impartially with Laboratory issues, make binding decisions and initiate appropriate action independent of other interests.

2. The decision making process is unilateral. Without a designated policy making body, the process of decision making is dictated by the contractual relationships. The University holding the prime contract is responsible and accountable to the funding agency for contractural performance. The subcontracting Universities are responsible and accountable to the prime contractor University.

3. The present organizational model is beset with bilateral conflict of interest difficulties. The effect of the present organization is to place one university in a superordinate position to the other cooperating universities. The prime contractor, as a state institution, must first serve its mandated interests and functions. Only then can it serve the interests of the National Laboratory and its constituent

components. The director, as an official of the university, must represent university interests first and Laboratory interests second. The prime contracting university is denied the privilege of competing for research and development support under this contract because of direct conflict of interest with subcontractors.

4. In order to maintain the Laboratory's effort and momentum under the present organizational structure, decisions have been based primarily on the criterion of expediency. Because of the lack of a well articulated and planned body of policy undergirding the programmatic effort toward which the Laboratory is striving, a least squares mechanical approach has had to be used in the decision making process. Therefore, the organization is vulnerable to external as well as internal power forces which may not be considering the best interests of the Laboratory or the children it serves. While the Laboratory must be sensitive to the expressed needs of a variety of constituencies, it must also develop a long range vision and resist disruptive intrusions upon its central purpose. Sensitivity is one thing, vulnerability is quite another.

Discussion and Implications

There is developing an extensive body of empirical and clinical literature dealing with some of the issues that have been raised. For

the purposes of this paper, an exhaustive review would be inappropriate but selected material will be cited which bears directly on the issues in this discussion.

The growing concern in the country over the decrease of accountability and responsibility of individuals and groups to each other has led to careful documentation of the elements related to such "alienation." Alienation within an organization can be the greatest threat to its continued developmental momentum and productivity. Darley and Latané's (1966) laboratory and field study documentation of the decrease in social accountability is impressive. They have shown that accountability is a function of the individual's sense of real and responsible participation in the society or its instrumentalities. The extent to which he is denied such participation, he is less likely to perceive himself as accountable in any fashion and, therefore, refuses to act productively.

A national organization which embodies more than a discussion forum, but is problem focused and action oriented, must pay careful attention to the question of productivity, its raison d'etre. Productivity is related to participation. Here real and responsible participation is assumed to involve the decision making structure and process where one can clearly perceive his voice being heard in matters controlling his destiny.

The literature is clear regarding effective structural dimensions for decision making.

1. Individuals must have real or actual power in the decision making structure. Schopler (1965) has shown that dissatisfaction and low productivity are related to differences between perceived power and actual power on the part of individuals associated with an organization. He has referred to this discrepancy between perceived and actual power as "inequity." Situations which maximize inequity are those where the individual's input to the decision making structure is essentially a semantic game.

In these days of increasing fiscal constraints, Clark's work is particularly pertinent. He was able to show that perceived inequity and the cost of operation of an organization were directly and positively related in an almost perfect correlation (Clark, 1958, p. 287). Thibaut (1950) and Patchen (1959) have demonstrated that perceived inequity is directly related to such problems as absenteeism and leaving the field (i.e., quitting, transfer, etc.).

These data strongly suggest that the most extreme forms of alienation between the individual and the organization (and by implication, between organizational components and the organization) result when real or actual participation in the decision making structure and process is denied.

2. Individuals involved in the decision making structure must have direct participation. It should be made clear that the individuals in the organization are necessary for the organization to function. When the participation appears unilateral, problems develop. But when the participation is a sham, made to feel participation, the effect is disastrous. Not only is "mock" participation an ineffective way to structure an organization, it is inefficient as a decision making process. At best, it presents a forum for polite discussion, at worst, a mechanism for coercion. Lammers (1967) concluded that "mock" participation, for example, meetings of superiors and subordinates of the made to feel participation type, were less effective and efficient than the absence of participation.

3. The decision making structure must be made explicit. Cohen (1959) found that lack of structure in a situation significantly increases the threat felt by low power individuals with an expected decrease in productivity and increase in dissatisfaction. Hoffman (1965) has concluded from his work that an optimal amount of structure for a given task was positively related to effective group problem solving. If such structures are not made explicit, the chances of intrusions and diversions by some "authority figure" are greatly increased. Under such conditions the character of the discussion and

the work focus changes in keeping with the desires and wishes of the "authority figure." Maier and Hoffman (1960) and Bass (1963) have pointed out that in such situations there is greater concentration on the ideas of the high status person resulting in the group spending an inordinate amount of time supporting or rejecting his ideas rather than searching for alternatives.

4. A horizontal or "flat" structure produces greater productivity than does a vertical or "tall" structure. Pelz and Andrews (1966) in their book on Scientists in Organizations concluded from their exhaustive study of Ph. D. researchers in organizations that productivity was significantly increased when the scientist was able to directly influence the decision making process. They defined vertical structure as one where the decision goes from the decision makers through a long line of subordinates or "middle men" to the scientist. In a horizontal structure, the decision goes from the decision maker to the scientist either directly or through a much shorter "line." Pelz and Andrews suggest that such a flat structure increases the influence of the scientist and still preserves coordination within the organization. They point out the need for face to face interaction between the scientist and other significant people in

the research and development system, especially between the scientists and the decision makers who will review his work and provide input for future directions (p. 33).

5. Individuals must be ego involved in the organization and its mission. This statement needs no amplification. In the case of the Laboratory, the issues in this paper would never have been raised if the members were not genuinely dedicated and committed to their work and the field of early childhood. Their commitment to the organization is demonstrated by their efforts to participate in its development as a new instrumentality which can help their work and that of their colleagues to have a significant impact on the field.

From the foregoing discussion of the issues and the five characteristics of an effective decision making structure, the following implications and criteria seem warranted.

The Laboratory must have an explicit decision making structure designed to facilitate and enhance progress in fulfilling its mission and commitment. This structure must include

1. A designated body empowered to set policy for the National Laboratory including:

   a. Operational research and development goals and objectives.

b. Program priorities

c. Evaluation criteria and processes

d. Resource allocations

e. Operational strategies

f. Fiscal accountability and integrity

2. This body must be constituted to first serve the needs of the field of early childhood and the Laboratory.

3. It must provide for effective participation in the decision making process by Laboratory members and the field it serves.

4. It must be impartial in its relationships with cooperating and participating institutions and agencies.

5. It must be able to enter into contractural relationships to provide resources for implementing the Laboratory's programs and activities.

6. It must be able to initiate action

a. To provide long range planning for program development

b. To broaden the resource base, both material and human

c. To enhance collaborative efforts and communications

d. To provide facilitating services to member components

e. To disseminate the findings and products of the Laboratory

7. It must be able to attract, hold, and provide for succession of highly qualified staff to execute its decisions.

The Present Organization

In brief, the present organizational structure consists of a National Coordination Center and ERIC Clearinghouse and six research and development centers. All are university based. The prime contract is held by the University of Illinois and administered through the Coordination Center with specific allocations to the ERIC Clearinghouse from the prime contract. The research and development centers are funded on a subcontract basis from the prime contract through the participating universities; Arizona, Chicago, Cornell, Kansas, Peabody, and Syracuse.

The decision making structure is embodied in the language of the prime contract and must stand as the most explicit statement available. Excerpts will be cited.

"Contractor--University of Illinois" (Amendment of Solicitation/Modification of Contract, pg. 1, 12/1/68)

"...the Contractor will conduct activities through a National Coordination Center and an ERIC Clearinghouse to foster the above mentioned purposes." (Article 1, Section I)

"To fulfill the purpose of this contract, the Contractor will carry out the work specified in the document entitled Appendix A....." (Article 1, Section II)

"Work and services to be performed under the terms and conditions of this contract shall be under the supervision of James O. Miller, Director, National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education. The contracting officer or his authorized representative reserves the right to approve or disapprove any successor to the Directorship." (Article 4)

"The Steering Committee is composed of the director of each center including ERIC and NCC. The chairman of the Steering Committee is the Director of the National Coordination Center. A representative of the Office of Education is an Ex Officio (non-voting) member of this committee. This committee will meet regularly to formulate policies and program plans and to work out operational problems." (Article 22) [Italics added, last sentence]

"The Advisory Board shall not exceed sixteen members, including a chairman, appointed for terms not to exceed three years. Appointments shall be made such that approximately one-third of the membership shall be new each year. Appointments to the Advisory Board are subject to approval by the government. Written notice of

approval shall be obtained from the Contracting Officer for appointments made by the Contractor.

"The Director of the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education and a representative of the Office of Education will serve as Ex Officio (non-voting) members of the Board.

"The Board will serve as an advisory council to the National Laboratory. The Board will meet at least twice a year to consider broad policy and program questions and to review the activities of the National Coordination Center." (Article 23) [Italics added, last paragraph]

The decision making body for the National Laboratory is the Contractor--the University of Illinois. The specific body designated by the University of Illinois is unclear. In theory it would have to be the Board of Trustees who in turn delegate the authority to the College of Education and/or the National Coordination Center. The Steering Committee and the Advisory Board are ruled out by the language of the cited articles in the contract. While the contractual language is explicit in the abstract, it is operationally implicit.

For the same reasons that the powers of the Steering Committee and the Advisory Board must be formative and advisory only, so as not to dictate policy to the University of Illinois, so too, the mechanisms of the decision making structure and process must remain

ambiguous so as not to appear to dictate the policy of the participating universities. Since the organizational structure already places one university in superordinate relationship to the others, expediency dictates ambiguity to relieve irritation.

In short, it must be concluded that no amount of contractual tinkering can resolve the basic issues involved or provide an acceptable model which meets the criteria for an effective decision making structure under the present organizational pattern.

Alternative Organizations

Several alternatives can be presented which at first glance alleviate some of the problems inherent in the present organization. The first might be to place the Coordination Center in a direct line relationship with the Provost of the University rather than association with a department or college. This would make explicit the decision making body--the National Coordination Center. It might be possible under such an institute structure to provide direct participation at the level of policy formulation. However, a certain amount of this participation would be "mock" participation in that members of other institutions could not participate in the actual decisions. The Director would remain an official of the University and those interests would take first priority over those of the Laboratory.

In summary, the institute arrangement could resolve the issue of an explicit decision making structure and process. It could provide a designated body to set policy for the National Laboratory. It could enter into contractural relationships with less internal conflict of interest. It might provide a better base for diversified staff recruitment. It would be equally able to initiate action.

It would not solve the issue of a unilateral decision making process. It would not solve the issue of bilateral conflict of interest. It could not constitute a decision making body to first serve the needs and interests of the field and Laboratory. It could not completely provide for effective participation in the decision making process.

Another alternative might be for the National Coordination Center to have a status similar to a foundation affiliated with the University. Examples of this type of organization are the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health associated with the University of Texas and the Indiana University Foundation associated with Indiana University. The governing bodies of both of these foundations state in their by-laws that they are functions of and operate as integral parts of their respective universities. Although the Indiana University Foundation is incorporated, its by-laws state that the majority of its directors must always be graduates of the University of Indiana.

They consult yearly with the trustees of the university for input into their planning and decision making. The Hogg Foundation operates as an integral part of the University of Texas and carries on cooperative relationships with other departments and components of the University. It also operates through its university with other universities, state-wide organizations, and other groups.

While some gains might accrue in the area of more effective participation, it would appear to be similar to the institute arrangement. Foundations appear to be primarily fiscal devices to handle privately donated funds within a publicly supported institution, thus providing tax benefits to donor friends of the institution.

A third alternative structure would be association of the Coordination Center with an existing non-profit organization. The Social Science Research Council would be an appropriate example. The following notes are taken from the governing section of the by-laws of this organization.

> "Of 30 members of the Board of Directors, 21 are designated by seven national scientific societies... and nine members are elected by the board itself. The board meets twice a year to advance research in the social sciences. The work of the Board of Directors is done through an extensive committee system and staff. The executive committee exercises the powers of the Board of Directors between meetings. Almost all business clears through the committee on problems and policies before going to the board or executive committee. Committees are assisted by a considerable

number of advisory and planning committees, sometimes with their own separate sub-committee system..."

This alternative fails to meet the criteria in any better way than those already presented. In fact, the administrative machinery appears to be designed to inhibit decision making rather than facilitating it. The comments relevant to the institute arrangement apply.

Alternatives of Choice

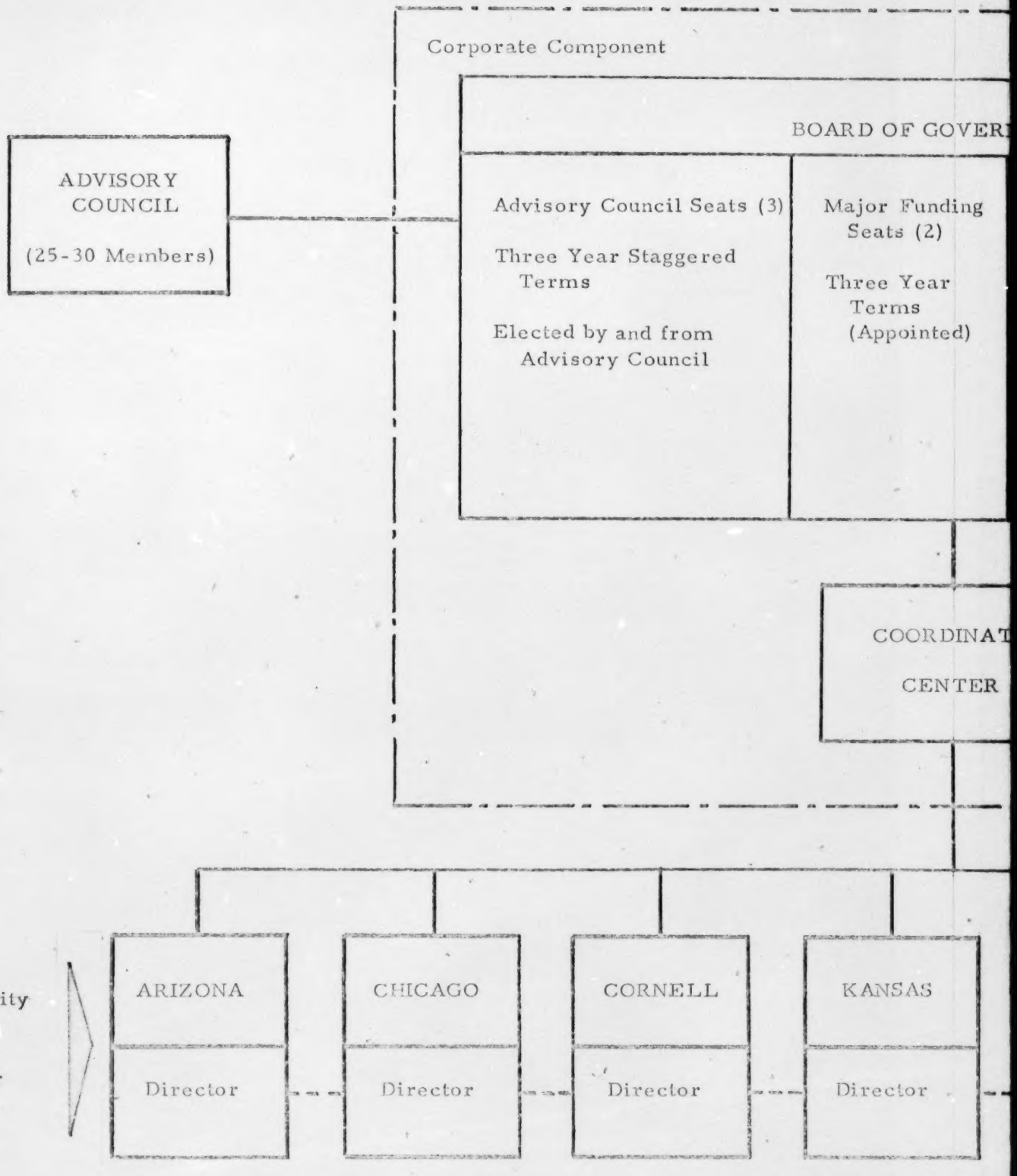
The next two alternatives were developed from Steering Committee discussions, Coordination Center Staff discussions, study of the ad hoc planning committee notes, extensive study of existing Laboratory and Research and Development Center organizations and personal conversations with various interested professionals.

Each of these alternatives embody incorporation as a non-profit organization. The corporate body includes a Board of Governors for the National Laboratory with an executive staff function in the Coordination Center. The research and development centers would remain university based and outside the corporate structure, obviously. In each case the Board of Governors would be the designated decision making body. The number would be kept relatively small (nine) to provide an optimal working group.

In Plan One (see foldout) the Board of Governors would be constituted by three elected members from the Advisory Council, three

THE NATIONAL LABORATORY

Plan One



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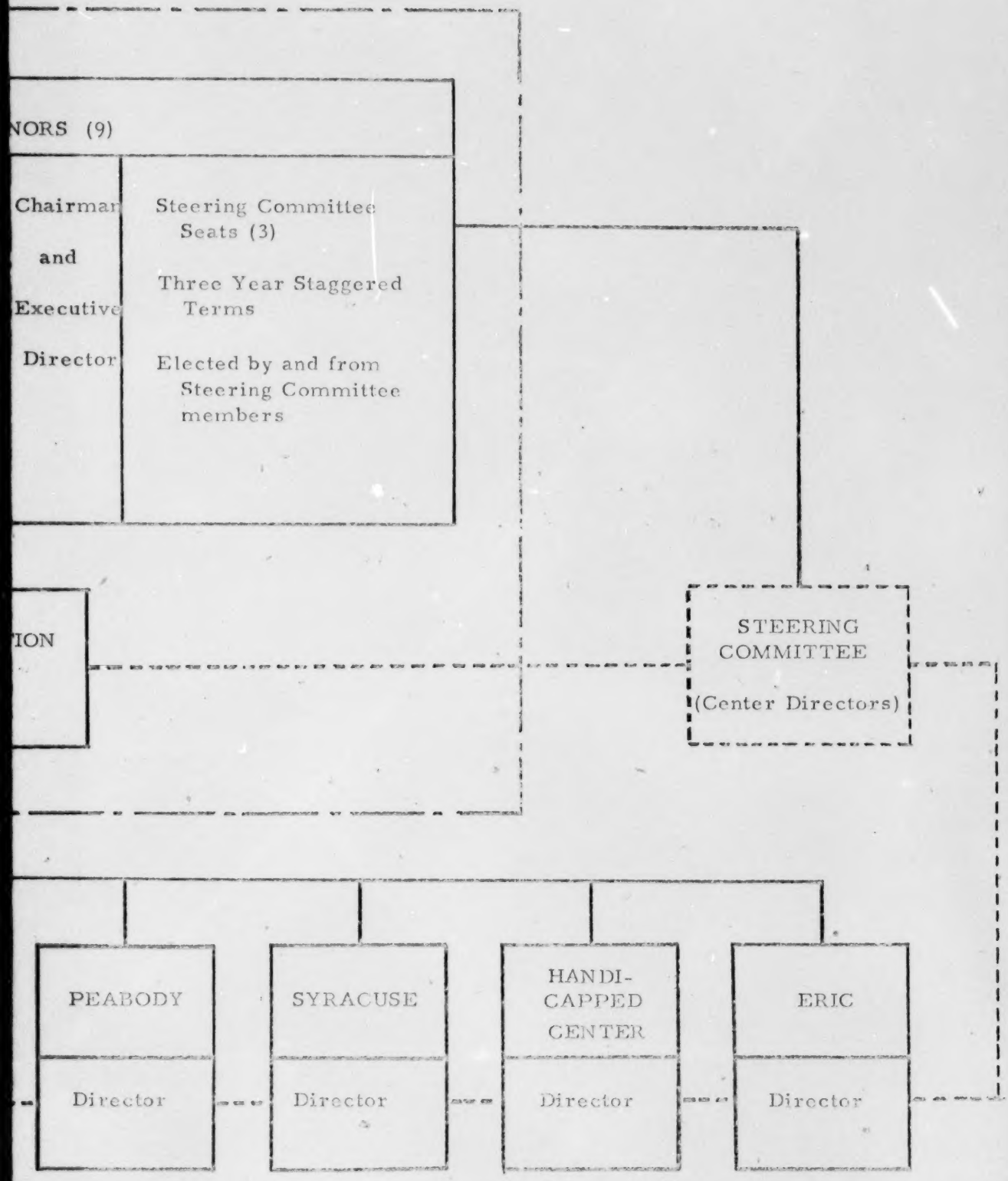

elected members from the Steering Committee, two appointed representatives of the major funding agencies, and the Executive Director of the Laboratory who would serve as chairman.

This plan provides a balance of power in the decision making process and includes direct participation by representatives of the field and members of the Laboratory. In order to gain direct participation, however, the legislative and executive functions are compounded which does not resolve the issue of conflict of interest entirely. The issue would be particularly critical in matters relating to contractual arrangements, allocation of resources, and review and evaluation.

Plan Two (see foldout 2) handles this problem by stipulating that representatives of the electing bodies come from outside their membership. The executive director becomes ex officio and there is a clear separation of legislative and executive functions on the Board of Governors. Direct participation is replaced by direct representation. In this plan the Steering Committee functions as an executive cabinet in the corporate body with the expressed function of formulating Laboratory policy for Board of Governors' action and as staff members of the corporate body have the responsibility of executing the Board of Governors' decisions. The field of early childhood is represented by its elected members to the Board of Governors. Again, a balance of

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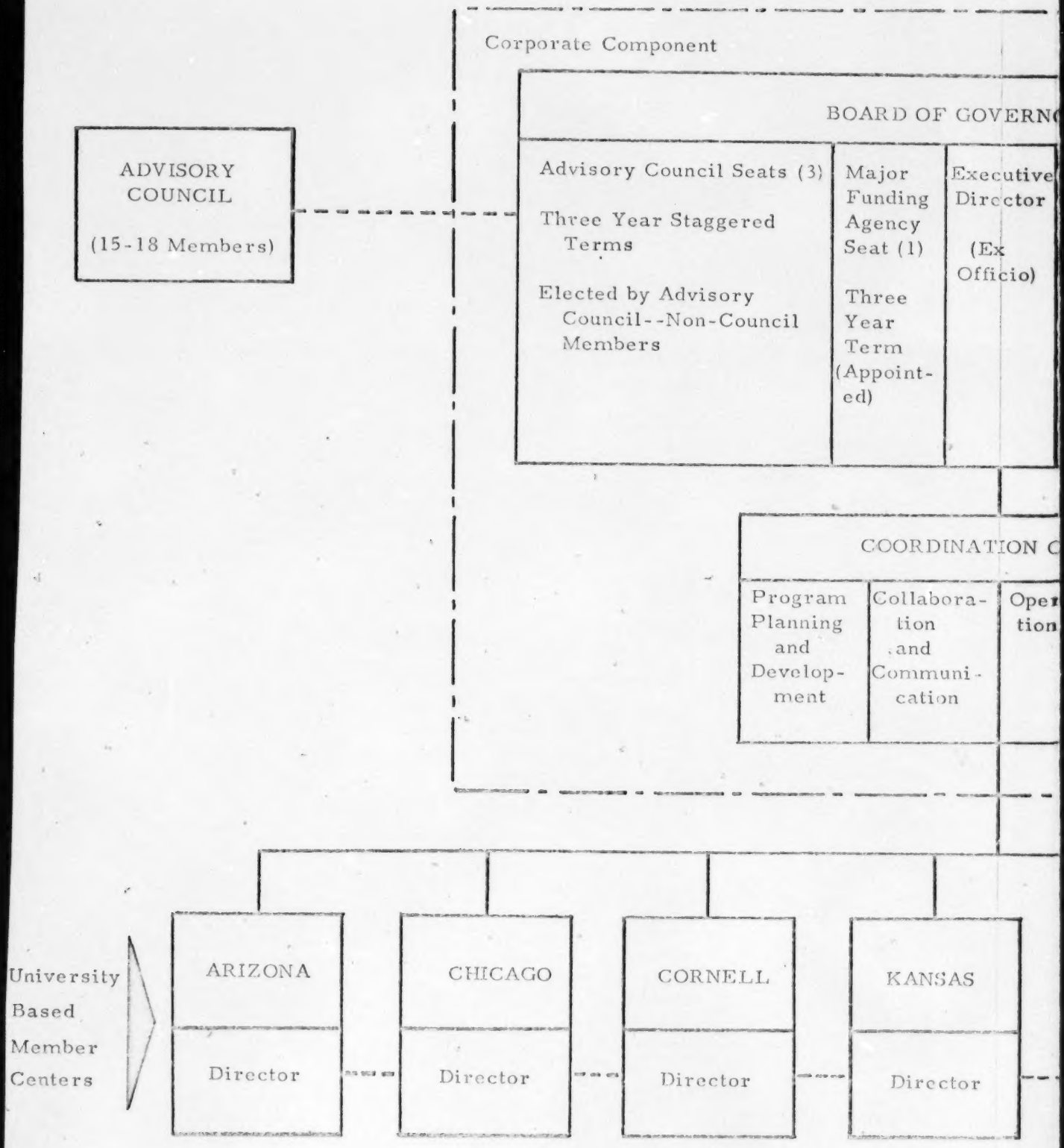
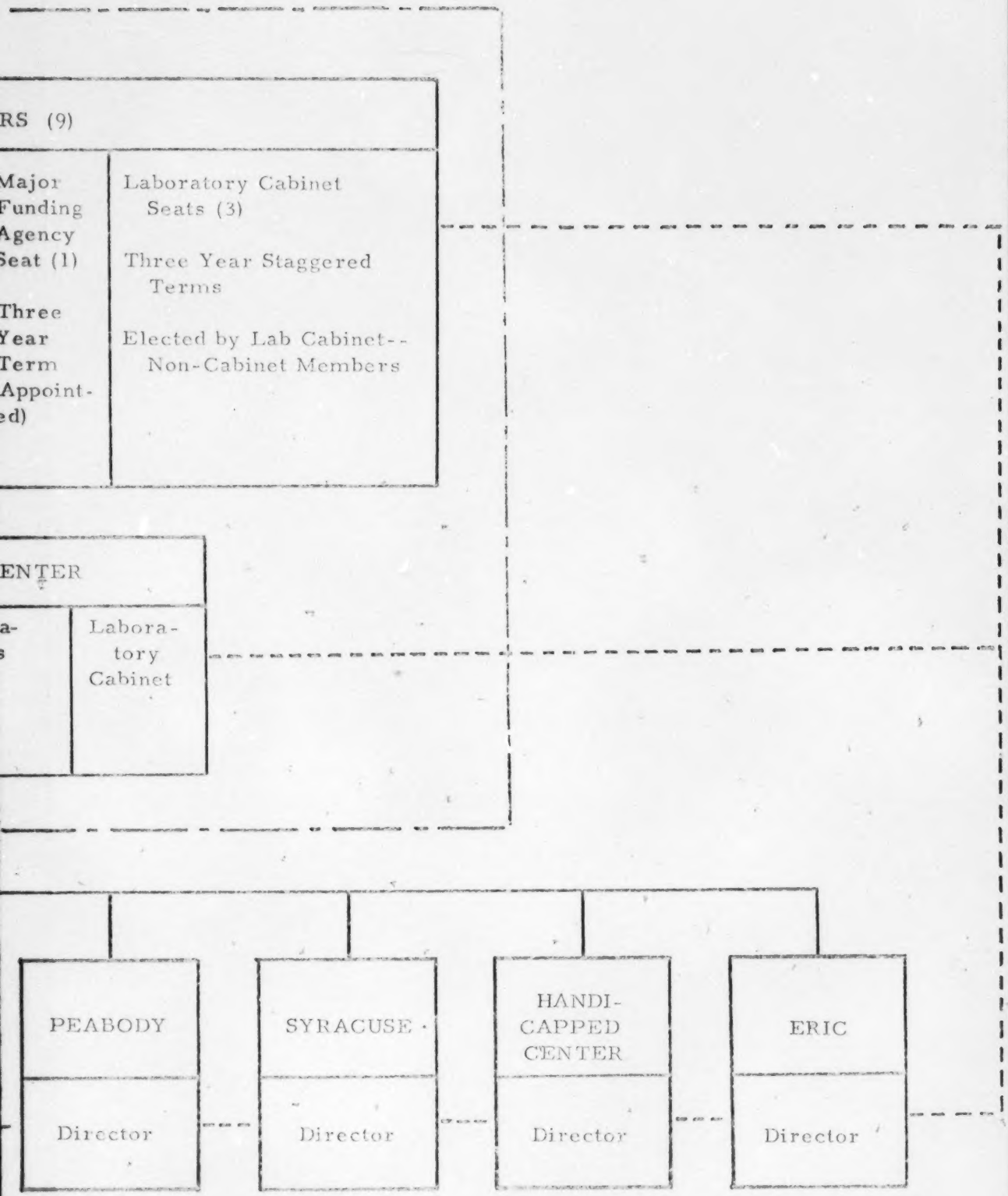
Plan Two

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Laboratory Cabinet
PEABODY
Director
SYRACUSE
Director
HANDICAPPED CENTER
Director
ERIC
Director

power is maintained in the decision making process. Plan Two appears to embody all the criteria for an effective decision making structure and to resolve the basic organizational issues raised.

In summary, Plan Two which calls for the establishment of a non-profit corporation, embodying a Board of Governors and a Coordination Center to carry on the business of the Laboratory, would create an explicit decision making structure and process. Through the corporate mechanism, the needs and interests of the field of early childhood and the Laboratory are the first concerns of the decision makers. The Board of Governors would be empowered to set policy, enter into contractual relationships and retain staff to execute the business of the Laboratory. Through the mechanism of direct representation of the Laboratory members and the field of early childhood, as well as the creation of an executive cabinet, participation in the decision making process is maximized. The issue of a unilateral decision making process is eliminated through the system of checks and balances, direct representation of appropriate constituencies, and separation of executive and legislative functions. Since the issue of bilateral conflict of interest is resolved, impartial relationships with cooperating institutions and agencies is assured. This organizational pattern greatly reduces the vertical structure in comparison with the present pattern and the other alternatives.

Special Issues and Considerations

Advisory Council Role. In the alternatives of choice, the role of the Advisory Council would continue to be advisory on broad policy issues. However, it would have added leverage in the decision making process through its power of direct representation on the Governing Board. Its role as advisor would be much more explicit in that it would be advisory to the governing body of the National Laboratory. I would recommend continued active representation from the Advisory Council on review procedures. More importantly, I would recommend that resources be set aside for the Council to prepare and commission state of the art papers and position papers on issues in the field of Early Childhood which would become valuable resources for program planning and development as well as contributions to the field. I'm sure that a Governing Board and the Coordination Center would try to implement procedures where the Council's contributions on substantive issues could be made available in more useful form.

Recruitment and Succession. Successful recruitment, retention and succession of professional talent is an important issue in the proposed alternatives of choice. Fear has been expressed that lack of university affiliation for the Coordination Center would create a serious staffing problem. The attractiveness of the university must rest in its

job security, rank and pay and tenure rights. Only selected individuals of the National Coordination Center enjoy these benefits presently.

Careful selection of a location for the corporate entity is a basic consideration to provide attractive conditions for staff recruitment. It should be located in a cultural and university center where professional growth can be nurtured. The Coordination Center should actively develop university privileges for its professional staff. Adjunct professorships should be arranged where appropriate and mutually advantageous to provide staff involvement in the university community. In our studies of feasibility, we have been assured that such relationships would be desirable and available.

A well planned "sabbatical" system for the professional staff where the resources of the member universities could be used would be another means of insuring academic involvement. This is a valuable resource uniquely available to the National Laboratory. A part of the system might be special projects assignment which would require scholarly productions. These might include special issues papers or review papers. Encouragement and support should be given to personal research involvement and productivity.

Not the least consideration should be the value of a highly visible position in a unique research and development organization. The chance to work productively and innovatively in a developing organization

should not be overlooked. Senior professionals might well be attracted to such an organization to relight their fire so to speak.

An attractive, competitive salary and wage schedule with appropriate fringe benefits can be an incentive. Within established guidelines (USOE), some risk adjustment would be appropriate.

In summary, an imaginative personnel policy can be established which can be very attractive to the creative and competent talent with which the Coordination Center would wish to associate. It has been and will continue to be the position of the Director that the staff of the National Coordination Center should remain relatively small in order to avoid a resource sapping superstructure for the Laboratory. The formalization of the present Steering Committee's role as an executive cabinet should help to provide depth and scientific acumen to the executive function.

Organizational Stability. In addition to a stabilized decision making structure and process which will help to provide internal stability, the way would be opened for development of diversified funding. Diversification can provide better predictability and relieve the pressure from basic support providing all the resources for a complex operation.

U.S. Office of Education support would not be jeopordized by a change in the organizational structure. Indeed, there is every reason

to believe it would find support more defensible. The broad political base represented by the university based research and development centers, well dispersed geographically, would continue to be a strength.

Summary

In this paper the problems, and issues of the organizational structure of the National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education have been presented. Characteristics of an effective decision making structure and process have been explored and the essential dimensions of an organizational model developed. Alternatives to the present organizational pattern have been presented and discussed. Plan Two has been recommended from the alternatives of choice and a comparison made of this structure to the criteria, problems and issues. Special issues and considerations involving this plan have been discussed. The decision now awaits your recommendations.

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